

## **Press release 26 April 2007**

### **International operation against oil polluters at sea successfully ended 5 ships caught red handed**

Today a large scale aerial surveillance operation against oil polluters at sea has successfully been completed at the Belgium military air base of Koksijde.

During the last 10 days, seven aircraft belonging to six countries flew over the English Channel and the southern part of the North Sea searching for oil pollution 24 hours a day.

Three aims were put forward:

- 10 days of continuous surveillance to catch oil polluters;
- To optimise the use of satellite imagery as a complementary surveillance means;
- Fast and effective judicial procedures following an observed polluter.

The means used during this 10-day operation are impressive. The participating countries are all contracting parties to the Bonn Agreement with the aim of carrying out surveillance and combating oil pollution. The following countries were present with their aircraft: the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Denmark, and Germany. Sweden and Norway were also present, but without their aircraft. The aircraft are equipped with video recording equipment, radar, infrared, ultraviolet and other sensors to search for oil pollution. More than 40 satellite images were used to supplement the aerial surveillance. In total 5 ships of 4 countries were kept on stand by for interventions at sea such as sampling of oil spills and the inspection of polluting ships.

More than 220 hours were flown continuously by 7 aircraft. By comparison, in one year Belgium flies 250 hours above the North Sea! In excess of 45 oil spills were detected by the participating aircraft. 5 ships were caught polluting. Three vessels were in UK waters, one in Dutch and one in Belgian waters that may be in contravention of international pollution regulations. The cases are now being investigated by their respective coastal states. Due to the ongoing investigation it is not possible to release any further information at this time.

Machteld Price operator at MUMM and coordinator of Super CEPCO looks back on a fruitful mission: " The operation has shown that there exists a requirement for a high level of aerial surveillance for marine pollution and that satellite images can play a large part in alerting coastal states to possible pollution. During the operation mathematical models have been produced by MUMM for predicting the movement of oil. As such the satellite images and aerial observations can be collated by the accurate addition of the model. Also new techniques were introduced e.g dropping oil sampling buoys."

The operation was led by the Management Unit for the Mathematical Model of the North Sea Mathematical Models (MUMM), a department of the Royal Belgian Institute for of Natural Sciences, in cooperation with 3 foreign partners: the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (UK), the French Customs and the North Sea Agency under the Netherlands Ministry for Transport, Public Works and Water Management, with the financial support of the European Commission. Also the Belgian Coast Guard Structure played an important role and guaranteed the cooperation of the Ministry of Defense, FPS the department of the Environment, the department of FPS Internal Affairs, the department of FPS Mobility and Transport, and the FPS Justice department.

Also the minister of the North Sea Mr. Landuyt is satisfied with the results: “Belgium, the other North Sea countries and the European Commission wanted to give a signal to the maritime world with this Super CEPCO operation: that oil pollution in European waters is not tolerated and has to be stopped. These large surveillance operations will take place again in the future, on top of the regular surveillance. This operation will be evaluated later this year, and will lead to the drafting of European guidelines for the surveillance on oil polluters and the follow up procedures. The Belgian government wants to underline its zero tolerance for pollution in the North Sea”.

For more information:

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